

Wellbeing During Temporary International Relocation: Case Studies and Good Practices for the Implementation of the 2019 Barcelona Guidelines

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Martin
Roth
Initiative

Wellbeing During Temporary International Relocation

Case Studies and Good Practices for the Implementation of the 2019 Barcelona Guidelines

By Patricia Bartley



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Temporary International Relocation**
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for the Implementation
of the 2019 Barcelona Guidelines

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Introduction

The physical and psychological wellbeing of human rights defenders is key to the sustainability of their difficult and demanding work. In 2019, a group of professionals in the field of wellbeing support and relocation programmes for human rights defenders at risk developed the “Barcelona Guidelines on Wellbeing and Temporary International Relocation of Human Rights Defenders at Risk”.¹ The Guidelines frame principles about a collective approach to wellbeing and thus provide guidance for coordinators of temporary international relocation initiatives as well as for wellbeing support providers, such as coaches, therapists and mental health professionals.

The following collection of good practices and case studies aims to complement the principles of the Guidelines and to help put specific recommendations and cross-cutting issues of the Guidelines into practice. The examples gathered here have been provided by relocation managers and coordinators who have either directly seen the benefit of the wellbeing practices on the human rights defenders or who have received positive feedback from the defenders about such practices.² The collection focuses on four key areas of practice that are addressed by various principles in the Guidelines and that are central to successfully incorporating a broad understanding of wellbeing in relocation:

I.
Support and social networks
for relocated persons

II.
Integration of wellbeing plans and activities
in relocation (in the preparation and arrival
stage, in the relocation stage and at the end
of relocation/post-relocation stage)

III.
Management of difficult cases

IV.
Wellbeing of staff and supporters of
relocation initiatives

Each section starts with a brief outline of the context, followed by a compilation of good practices and examples and finally some key considerations to bear in mind. Each section is supplemented with a case study provided by a specific relocation programme.

¹
The Barcelona Guidelines are available in English, Arabic, Russian, Spanish and French at www.hrdhub.org/wellbeing.

²
All examples were collected through interviews between the author and 27 representatives of 18 relocation programmes covering various regions and based in different countries, including Tanzania, Georgia, Colombia, UK, Uganda, Czech Republic, Mexico, Norway, Lebanon, Netherlands, Costa Rica, Germany and Spain. We thank all those who participated in the research and contributed their best practices, challenges and case studies for this publication.

I.

Support and social networks for relocated persons

Human rights defenders need to feel safe and secure while they are in temporary relocation and this may require the support of many individuals in the host community. More often than not a defender will face a very different social and cultural environment in relocation and dealing with everyday issues such as housing, transport, food shopping, cross-cultural communications and social expectations can be challenging. Engaging with members of the local community, either socially or professionally, has an important impact on feelings of integration and acceptance in a host country and prevents loneliness and isolation. Defenders may be exhausted when they arrive and need some time for rest before programmed activities begin.

The Guidelines recommend connecting defenders with local communities (**recommendation 18**), the establishment of friendship groups, networking opportunities and access to leisure activities (**recommendation 22**) and ensuring they have free time to relax, wander, sleep and take part in cultural activities (**recommendation 25**). They also recommend that coordinators be aware of the structural racism present in the institutions and organisations that defenders interact with (**recommendation 19**).

Good practices

Facilitate introductions into professional communities to build solidarity, e.g. between defenders and local lawyers and academics working in similar fields.

Facilitate links with the artistic community and match creative professionals with local artists and musicians. Through these links the defenders have an immediate contact with the local community and a network of people doing similar work.

Facilitate links with educational institutions. Defenders are often keen to give talks in schools and universities and meet members of the educational community. Some take university courses and benefit from engaging with students and academic life.

Establish links to local NGOs.

Example

In one relocation programme, *Amnesty International Spain*³, the defender is put in touch with a local human rights group. Members of the group arrange social activities and general accompaniment. This kind of voluntary support by other human rights activists is much valued by defenders who speak of the ‘therapeutic value of human solidarity’.

Relocate defenders to communities where they can blend in easily.

Example

The *Ubuntu Hub City Network*⁴ relocates defenders from an Arab culture to a North African city where the language and customs may be similar to those of the defender’s home.

Link defenders with networks of diaspora communities in the host city.

Example

*The East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (DefendDefenders)*⁵ has close contacts with the communities of other defenders in exile. These exiled defenders can share their knowledge of the local host community and befriend those in temporary relocation. This has the added bonus of keeping the defenders who have been unable to return home engaged in human rights work.

³ www.es.amnesty.org/quienes-somos/

⁴ www.africandefenders.org/what-we-do/hub-cities/

⁵ www.defenddefenders.org/

Establish a specific support/friendship network.

Example 1

The *Shelter City* programme run by *Justice and Peace*, Netherlands⁶, includes a ‘Buddy Scheme’ in which local volunteers offer defenders social and emotional support. All those supporting defenders in different roles can access trainings, webinars and readings on topics related to human rights defenders and relocation. The relationships between the supporters and a defender can last long after the defender has returned home and in some cases the ‘Buddies’ have been able to continue their support with such things as fundraising for the defender’s organisation.

Example 2

*The Centre for Applied Human Rights CAHR*⁷ in York, UK, runs a Friends Scheme to befriend newly arriving defenders on the Protective Fellowship Scheme (see Case Study I on p. 6).

Facilitate contact with neighbours.

Example

Some temporary relocation initiatives (*Hamburger Stiftung*⁸, *Defenred*⁹, *Shelter City Dar es Salaam/Africa Human Rights Network AHRN*¹⁰) have used the same housing for several years and over time have built an informal network of support with nearby residents. These neighbours have offered help when needed and established friendships with the defenders.

Help connecting defenders with local parents. Defenders accompanied by children can build social bonds with local families.

Acknowledge, discuss and act upon experiences of structural racism, sexism, xenophobia and other types of discrimination and harassment that defenders may face in relocation and facilitate advice on ways to deal with this.

Encourage defenders to learn the local language so they may feel more integrated in the community.

Offer language tuition or language exchange.

Example

Some defenders relocated by *AHRN* to the *Shelter City Dar es Salaam*, Tanzania, offer French classes in exchange for English classes with members of the local community.

Key considerations

Feelings of loneliness and isolation are common among defenders in relocation and these feelings may be more acute when defenders are living and working alone. Some defenders under threat cannot risk having a public presence and, in certain cases, high-risk defenders cannot openly engage with other defenders living in the same city. Great care must be taken to ensure those in contact with these defenders can be trusted.

It is also important to establish and assign clear roles to the various people supporting defenders in relocation to avoid confusion over responsibilities. Careful attention must be given to the matching of local community volunteers and defenders. Defenders should be asked if they prefer to be linked to a volunteer of a certain gender, or if other gender aspects need to be taken into consideration. It is recommended to ensure a good range of ages as well as social and professional backgrounds among the volunteer support group. A further recommendation is to acquire background information on both the defenders and the volunteers in advance in order to make the best matches.

⁶ www.justiceandpeace.nl/initiatives/shelter-city-human-rights-support/

⁷ www.york.ac.uk/cahr/defenders/protective-fellowship/

⁸ www.hamburger-stiftung.de/en/

⁹ www.defenred.org/

¹⁰ See www.ahrnfoundation.org/

“We must remember the enormous value of being surrounded by a very warm human rights community which appreciates the work you do when you can be very discouraged in your home community”

Human Rights Defender, CAHR, 2018

Case Study I

The Friends Scheme at the Centre of Applied Human Rights (CAHR), University of York

Background

The Friends Scheme was launched in 2013 to befriend newly arriving Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) on the Protective Fellowship Scheme at CAHR and to extend both their educational benefit and that of the wider city. Its two key intended outcomes are enhanced personal and developmental experiences for HRDs and strengthened engagement between the Protective Fellowship Scheme and the (local) host community.

Set-up of scheme

Prior to the launch of the Friends Scheme in 2013 some members of the local community were informally supporting the HRDs relocated to York by inviting them to social and cultural events, civil society meetings, trips to places of interest in the area and meals in their homes. It was agreed that the fellowship scheme would benefit from a more formal and larger network of local supporters. Through various local networks (e.g. local Amnesty International and Fairtrade groups) a wide group of people were contacted, an information meeting arranged and two coordinators set up a database of those interested in joining a 'Friends of Protective Fellows' scheme. Several years on there are about 45 members and three people coordinating the scheme.

Those wishing to participate in the scheme are invited to meet with the coordinators to discuss mutual expectations. Friends are drawn from a range of interests, intercultural experiences, ages and work backgrounds, though the majority are from the ranks of the retired and/or from a professional background.

Running of the scheme

Each HRD is linked with a small group of Friends (normally four people), matched as far as possible by shared interests. A general 'welcome' email from the coordinators is sent to incoming defenders ahead of their arrival in York explaining the Friends Scheme. This is followed by a composite email from their particular Friends' 'small' group which includes a photo and a short introduction from each Friend.

Every year, shortly before the start of the new fellowship, a meeting is held to bring the full group of Friends together in order to plan for the time ahead, deal with any queries, and discuss the running of the scheme. It's also an opportunity to share any news of past HRDs. The meeting ends with the 'small' groups getting together to start to coordinate what activities they can offer to the new HRDs. Friends are also reminded of the importance of not using social media and other public forums to speak about these defenders and alerted to any particular needs attached to incoming HRDs. Each group is allocated to one of the scheme coordinators and provided with a 'First Things First' guide to cover the first days after the HRD's arrival and, later, a copy of the CAHR Handbook for Defenders.

Expectations from the Friends

The formal commitment required from Friends is for them to help the defender get settled into York during the first four to six weeks of their stay. This usually starts with at least one of the group meeting the HRD at the railway station on arrival, transporting them to their accommodation and providing them with a prepared (vegetarian) meal. In the following days and weeks, the Friends support the HRD in a number of ways: taking them on a tour of the city, helping with shopping, registering with a doctor and the police station (where appropriate), inviting them to social and cultural events, meals and introducing them to other members of the local community.

Any contact beyond the first 4-6 weeks is formally outside the Friends Scheme. However, in practice a large number of the Friends maintain regular contact with the HRD during the time they spend in the city and some remain in contact after the end of the Fellowship. Ad hoc groups of Friends are enlisted to help defenders get to the train station at the end of their stay and to help empty and clean accommodation.

Friends receive information about events throughout the year that may be of interest. These include public talks given by the defenders themselves and there are usually a good number of Friends in the audience at such talks.

Additional language support

A small group of Friends runs a weekly conversational English group for defenders who do not speak English already. All are qualified and/or experienced in teaching English as a foreign language. These language sessions are well received by the HRDs and complement the formal English classes offered by the University. In particular, they welcome the opportunity to practice conversation, improve their listening and have social engagement with the other defenders and the ‘tutors’.

Supervision of the scheme

The three coordinators of the Friends Scheme support the ‘small’ Friends groups between them and they are available for phone or email consultation in the event of any difficulties or queries. Two ‘drop-in’ sessions for Friends are offered at coordinators’ houses following the autumn intake of HRDs to provide an opportunity to discuss shared experiences and raise any concerns. An informal social event at CAHR is organised towards the end of the first six weeks where Friends, HRDs and CAHR staff can get to know the wider group. This is an excellent opportunity for networking and establishing greater contacts in the local community. HRDs are asked to provide feedback about the Friends Scheme in their end of fellowship evaluation and it has always been very positive.

Successes

As one HRD commented, the new defenders value having a group of ‘ready-made friends’ especially as they are having to deal with a range of challenges when they arrive in relocation. These can include the logistical and practical challenges of settling into a new home with other defenders, setting up a UK phone and generally finding their way in a new culture, often alongside struggling with a foreign language.

They also have the emotional challenges of being away from colleagues, friends and family and, often, ongoing work commitments from a distance. The Friends are able to support the HRDs during this phase of their new life in relocation. This can ease many of the initial challenges as well as reduce the workload of CAHR staff.

The Friends provide much of the HRDs’ social and cultural entertainment and try to organise this around the defender’s interests. The HRDs report that they enjoy spending time with local families, learning more about local history and culture and that this is often a welcome break from their human rights work and studies. Some defenders spend Christmas and New Year with Friends and their families, and this can ease the loneliness for many of them feel when away from their own families and communities and outside of term time.

‘Befriending a Defender’ has brought a greater knowledge and understanding of human rights into the local community. The Friends (and their networks) have benefitted from learning about the work of the HRDs and the HRDs have benefitted from more networking, speaking and fundraising opportunities in the host community. The Friends, and particularly the coordinators of the scheme, have provided much valued support to the CAHR staff when they are dealing with difficult cases and circumstances. The fellowship manager is able to share concerns and seek the views and advice from others that have regular contact with the HRDs.

Challenges

Sometimes, one of the HRDs does not take their place on the fellowship scheme or shows little or no interest in meeting with their Friends. Although the HRDs may have good reasons, in both of these cases the Friends can feel disheartened as they have not been able to contribute as planned. Although this does not usually happen to the same Friends each time, this is always a possibility and could lead to Friends' withdrawal from the scheme (though this has not happened thus far). On the flip side, some HRDs have unreasonable expectations of the Friends, expecting them to be available at short notice to offer lifts, accompany them to medical visits and so on. This can be problematic for both sides. In addition, although it is made clear to both Friends and HRDs that Friends cannot offer financial help, this can very occasionally prove difficult to manage.

Many Friends establish close friendships with the HRDs and this continues well after the Fellowship ends. However, if a HRD is later subjected to legal and financial troubles, their Friends can be left feeling somewhat helpless or guilty about being able to do little at a distance. Conversely, returned HRDs have reported that even an occasional text message from their Friends can be of great support at times of struggle, just knowing that others are thinking of them.

There can be challenges in managing the befriending with HRDs sharing accommodation with others on the scheme. If there is tension within the shared accommodation, Friends may also find themselves being asked for support by their HRD. In these circumstances, close liaison between the scheme's coordinators and the fellowship manager is needed to avoid such dynamics becoming entangled and unconstructive.

II. Integration of wellbeing plans and activities in relocation

This section explores how wellbeing activities and plans can be successfully integrated into the relocation. It has been divided into three stages:

1. the preparation and arrival stage,
2. the relocation stage which includes both 'formal' wellbeing practices as well as 'informal' ones and finally
3. the end of relocation and post-relocation stage.

1.

Preparation and arrival stage

The Guidelines recommend developing local resources in advance of relocation and exploring activities that nurture defenders physically, mentally, spiritually, socially, culturally and politically as they often arrive in relocation exhausted and sometimes fearful (**recommendation 22**).

Good Practices

Support for wellbeing should begin before relocation when feasible. Relocation schemes should ask about wellbeing on application forms and speak to the defender in person, while being mindful that medical information may be subject to data protection. The defenders should be encouraged to be active participants and have control over their participation in wellbeing activities and therapeutic processes. Develop an individual relocation plan (that includes wellbeing) with each individual defender and involve key staff and wellbeing providers at the arrival stage.

Example

The programmes at *CAHR*, York, *Justice and Peace*, Netherlands, as well as *Shelter City Tbilisi*¹¹ run a workshop on psycho-education to introduce and develop a wellbeing plan. Being flexible, monitoring the plan regularly and changing it when needed help to meet the defenders' individual needs.

Sensitise everyone working with defenders in relocation to the work of human rights defenders and provide more detailed contextual information on the specific defenders (with their agreement).

Example

Justice and Peace provides training to all staff and supporters and offers a handbook and online materials related to the security and wellbeing of human rights defenders. The training is mostly delivered through webinars.

Where possible, contact local wellbeing professionals and develop a network of wellbeing support providers which may be called on once the defender is in relocation.

Accommodation arrangements should be sufficiently flexible as to support the individual wellbeing needs of defenders. Many value having their own home, others prefer to share. If defenders are sharing a house, there should be enough space for each person to have their own private areas.

Make the defender feel welcome, safe and comfortable from the start. Meet at the airport in person when possible, accompany the defender to their new home, and provide a cooked meal. Leave emergency contact details and a 'welcome pack' for the first few days (including information on the local area, maps, transport, their schedule and names of relevant people).

Key considerations

It can be very difficult to accurately assess a defender's wellbeing prior to relocation or upon their arrival due to a variety of reasons. Laws and ethics on data protection must be abided by and health information may be withheld by defenders who do not want to prejudice their relocation opportunity. Some programmes keep the defenders busy at the start of relocation, believing that this prevents them from dwelling on any fears, guilt and anxieties they may be feeling. Others prefer to allow plenty of time at the start of the programme for the defenders to rest and settle in. Several programmes focus on the defenders' physical health at the start of the programme.

¹¹ See www.sheltercity.nl/en/tbilisi-and-batumi-georgia/

2.

The relocation stage

The Guidelines recommend that the programme of activities in relocation be sufficiently flexible as to accommodate the wellbeing needs of individual defenders (**recommendation 23**)¹². Most defenders benefit from a reasonable level of activities, providing structure and a source of new experiences and ideas. Since wellbeing is understood as encompassing mental, emotional, spiritual and physical health, a broad range of activities can be helpful, from trauma therapy to body work, medical check-ups to creative approaches, but also everyday activities like sharing meals and attending cultural events. The guidelines also recommend that relocation initiatives should ensure that appropriate medical care is available for defenders (**recommendations 20 and 21**).

Good Practices

Recognise that many defenders will arrive in a state of ‘unwellness’ or may become unwell shortly after arriving in relocation. Ensure that they have access to adequate medical care from the start of the programme. It may be necessary to allocate funds for private health services if defenders are not entitled to free national health care.

Encourage defenders to develop a structured daily routine.

Example

This can happen through regular attendance at language or other scheduled classes, as offered to defenders relocated by the *International Cities of Refuge Network ICORN*¹³, who can attend language school every morning.

Encourage physical wellbeing through the practice of sporting activities and exercise (for example, walking in nature, hiking, yoga, bicycling and other athletic activities).

Offer educational sessions on wellbeing and psychosocial health for both programme staff and defenders sensitising them to common challenges that human rights defenders face around the world. Where possible these sessions should be led by a wellbeing practitioner familiar with the work of human rights defenders.

Introduce defenders to wellbeing early in the relocation programme and ‘normalise’ conversations around wellbeing. Talking openly about mental health can help to break the stigma. A simple way to normalise conversations is to stress that wellbeing matters to everyone. Talk about wellbeing informally over meals and drinks. Ask simple, non-judgmental questions and let others explain in their own words how they feel and what support they need.

Offer structured programming aimed at providing psychosocial support for wellbeing early in the programme and explain the roles of different mental health providers to defenders. These mental health providers should understand human rights activism, and have received trauma training.

Consider using Artistic and Creative Therapy sessions; including creative activities such as singing, dancing, storytelling, drumming classes, art therapy, creative writing and creative activism. Provide opportunities for defenders to meet with members of the creative community.

Example 1

DefendDefenders work with the creative method Theatre of the Oppressed.¹⁴

Example 2

CAHR runs a course in Creative Activism spread over eight sessions. Defenders explore ways of integrating different art forms (music, printing, modelling) into their area of work.

Example 3

Shelter City Tbilisi runs a three-day Arts Therapy Programme at the start of their programme which helps defenders assess their levels of stress, develop techniques to manage it and explain the various types of wellbeing support available to them in relocation. Near the end of the relocation they have further sessions on how to integrate stress management strategies into their lives on return.

¹²

In 2016 the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders developed seven principles underpinning good practices in the protection of defenders (A/HRC/31/55). Principle 7 stresses the need for practices to be flexible, adaptable, and tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of defenders (www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Defenders/A-HRC-31-55_en.pdf).

¹³

See www.icorn.org/

¹⁴

See www.beautifultrouble.org/theory/theater-of-the-oppressed/ for more information on the method.

Where possible provide a range of therapists that defenders can choose to work with.

Example 1

*People in Need*¹⁵ offers a choice of male/female therapists and a choice of languages to use.

Example 2

DefendDefenders offers defenders the chance to work online with a counsellor who speaks their language if they do not speak English or French.

Provide opportunities for groups of defenders to come together to share concerns and challenges and discuss how wellbeing is an essential security and sustainability issue. Use other words (resilience, security, sustainability, stress) if easier. Include topics such as stress management and collective care.

Example

Justice and Peace includes the topic of wellbeing in the Holistic Security Training sessions they run. This training emphasises that security and protection strategies include psychosocial (wellbeing) aspects. Examples of the importance of wellbeing are given and it is framed as a sustainability strategy and a political commitment issue (see Case Study II on p. 13).

Encourage the sharing of ‘success stories’ amongst the defenders. This may encourage those who are interested in therapy but are still hesitant.

Provide written or video material on wellbeing whenever available.

Example

DefendDefenders is developing a manual on wellbeing management and practices called “Resourcing Resilience”. Given the global spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19), they declared June 2020 the month of HRD wellbeing and shared valuable knowledge and experiences of HRDs in videos and testimonies.¹⁶

Consider including family members in group wellbeing sessions and training and ask for preferences in terms of mixed-gender or separated groups.

Running sessions in the countryside can be very beneficial.

Example

The programmes *Defenred*, *Comisión de Ayuda al Refugiado en Euskadi (CEAR)*¹⁷ and *Mundubat*¹⁸ promote ‘walking and talking about wellbeing’ in a natural environment.

Offer other activities for wellbeing, such as retreats and relaxation treatments, including spa treatments, massage, yoga, diafreo, body-work sessions, gardening and access to alternative medicine practitioners, and plan for them in the budget.

Offer retreats in the countryside and a travel allowance to visit other places nearby.

Example

Mundubat and *CAHR* arrange short retreats in the countryside where defenders can relax in natural surroundings and find time to rest from their work and other programmed activities.

Example

Defenred offers 4–6 week rest periods for defenders in the mountains outside Madrid.

¹⁵

See www.clovekvtisni.cz/en/what-we-do/human-rights-support

¹⁶

www.defenddefenders.org/june-2020-hrd-well-being/

¹⁷

www.cear-euskadi.org/

¹⁸

www.mundubat.org

Offer opportunities for self-empowerment.

Example

Shelter City Tbilisi offers defenders the opportunity to learn to drive which is particularly valued by female defenders who have not previously had the opportunity. Being able to drive is seen as very self-empowering as well as a security and protection issue.

Do not underestimate the role that normal, everyday activities, such as sharing meals with other defenders and programme staff play in supporting wellbeing in relocation. Once removed from their places of work defenders may have more time for socialising, spending time on hobbies, cooking and talking with friends.

Key considerations

Some defenders may be reluctant to accept psychological support due to a variety of reasons also highlighted in the Guidelines. In this case nontraditional methods can work better. Some defenders may feel uncomfortable sharing their concerns in a mixed-gender space. Others may be afraid to speak openly in a group and share their experiences due to security concerns and they need the confidentiality of one-to-one sessions. For some cultures and communities where wellbeing is primarily seen as collective care, there may be some reluctance to engage in practices that focus on individual care. Many defenders in relocation worry about family members and colleagues left behind. These worries can override any wellbeing interventions. Ensure that defenders receive an adequate allowance to provide for themselves and families and enable them to cover all their expenses and care obligations.

3.

End of relocation and post-relocation stage

The Guidelines recommend that some defenders' uncertainty and anxiety at the end of relocation should be taken seriously (**recommendation 26**) and that the attention paid to wellbeing should be sustainable and should not stop with the end of relocation (**recommendation 27**).

Best practices

If necessary, provide the defender with extra psychosocial support during this phase and assist with developing a risk analysis for the return.

Facilitate wellbeing support after the defender has returned to their place of origin or has moved to another location.

Example

DefendDefenders and *Shelter City Tbilisi* enable defenders to continue receiving psychological support from a counsellor online.

Provide defenders with an allowance at the end of the programme to support them on their return when they may need to find a new job and a new home.

Key considerations

The time towards the end of the relocation is often experienced as stressful and any measures that help with developing a feasible exit strategy are beneficial. Wellbeing should not stop with the end of relocation. Defenders returning from relocation should have feasible pathways to sustainable wellbeing and be able to bring new approaches to wellbeing developed during relocation to their communities.

Case Study II

Shelter City by Justice and Peace Netherlands

Justice and Peace is a non-profit organisation based in The Hague that promotes respect for human rights and social justice in the Netherlands and worldwide. Through its *Shelter City* initiative, it offers human rights defenders at risk a three-month temporary stay in one of its 12 *Shelter Cities* in the Netherlands. During their relocation, the human rights defenders follow trainings on holistic security, advocacy, wellbeing and self-care and have the opportunity to extend their network of civil society organisations and political contacts in The Hague, Brussels and elsewhere, with the aim that they can continue their work safely and effectively in both the short and long term.

Wellbeing is an important focus of the *Shelter City* programme and it is approached from different angles. Living in a safe and welcoming environment, taking a break from work and getting international recognition for what they do are important contributors to the psychological rehabilitation and resilience-building of HRDs. It is also important that they find a social network to support them in relocation as they are far away from friends and family. City coordinators are tasked with ensuring that HRDs are not isolated during their stay and find ‘buddies’ for them to undertake (social) activities. Discrete professional psychological support is made available to all HRDs who wish to access it and questions of wellbeing and self-care are also covered in their holistic approach to security.

When HRDs apply to the programme, they are asked to indicate which aspects of the programme content they are particularly interested in. Wellbeing is one such aspect and it is generally something that the HRDs express an interest in prior to arrival. Once in relocation a personalised plan with the HRD’s objectives for relocation is developed. The objectives are reviewed at regular points during the stay and it has been found that wellbeing can become more of a priority objective during the relocation period. It can take some time for some HRDs to see that they can benefit from more wellbeing activities.

Several blocks of training are offered to all the HRDs whilst they are in relocation. The topic of wellbeing is included in the Holistic Security training with group sessions run by a specialised trauma counsellor who is external to the organisation. Holistic Security training emphasises that security and protection strategies should include a wide range of aspects: legal, digital, physical and psychosocial (wellbeing). Examples of the importance of wellbeing are given and it is framed as a sustainability strategy and a political commitment issue. Jargon and technical language is avoided when speaking about wellbeing, making it comprehensible and accessible to all. These sessions cover areas such as techniques for self-care, collective care, stress management, relaxation and talking therapies. All of the HRDs are expected to attend at least the first session on wellbeing.

The main success of such an approach is that relocation managers have seen that many of the HRDs request individual counselling sessions after they have attended this group training.

On top of group sessions on wellbeing and self-care, bodywork and relaxation sessions are made available after every training day with a professional bodywork trainer. He teaches relaxation techniques, breathing exercises, stress management techniques, coping with aggression techniques etc. Videos to practice at home are made available on Justice and Peace’s website.

Experienced and vetted therapists are available within the *Shelter City* Network. Finding adequately experienced wellbeing professionals (counselors, coaches and psychologists) has been challenging at times, particularly in smaller cities. Criteria have recently been developed to support the coordinators of each Shelter City in their search for suitable practitioners. When the HRD has expressed an interest in receiving counselling prior to arrival this is taken into consideration when deciding on where to place them in relocation; i.e. they will be relocated to a city that has a good range of counselling services. If for some reason the HRD does not get on with the allocated therapist, they can request to see another one.

Some counsellors and psychologists remain in contact with the defenders after the relocation period has ended and some remain available to conduct Skype sessions with them after they return home. These follow-up sessions are included in the relocation budget.

Feedback on the wellbeing support and training provided is very positive. Some defenders have described it as a life-changing experience. The *Shelter City* programme is fortunate to have an excellent trainer who is able to establish a quick and trusting rapport with the participants in the early stages of their relocation. This relationship is seen as key to the further uptake of wellbeing therapies.

While the *Shelter City* coordinators may encourage the HRDs to see a therapist, they make it clear that there are limits to what can be achieved in a three-month period. It is possible to work on issues such as stress management and building resilience, or on reducing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

III.

Management of difficult cases

Context

Defenders with wellbeing challenges will require extra support in relocation. They may experience social skill deficits, become very withdrawn and might not realise that they need help. Furthermore, there is the risk that programmes exclude a defender from relocation if they have a physical or mental condition that is beyond the capacity of the programme to manage, or if relocation risks exacerbating the condition.

The Guidelines recommend that defenders facing challenges to their wellbeing should not be denied access to participation in temporary international relocation initiatives unfairly and that programmes should consider interventions before the arrival of the defender to support their participation in relocation (**recommendation 17**).

Good practices

Whilst respecting the defenders' right to privacy, gather information about their wellbeing in advance of relocation through application forms and personal interviews. However, when discussing medical and wellbeing issues with a third person, it is essential to consider ethical questions of confidentiality as well as data protection laws both nationally and regionally (e.g. the General Data Protection Regulation in the EU).

Depending on the programme capacity and nature of the condition, a defender facing extra challenges may be fast tracked into relocation or relocation may be postponed to a period when it will be more beneficial. Strive to relocate the defender to a place with good medical and support services.

Explore alternative approaches (e.g. internal relocation within the defender's country of residence) if the programme does not have the capacity to host them.

Explore options for medical treatment and/or psychosocial support for defenders before they leave their home country.

Example

In Colombia, *Somos Defensores*¹⁹ arranges for all defenders and families to receive psychosocial support in their own country for several weeks in advance of relocation.

Ensure travel arrangements to relocation are as comfortable and smooth as possible (this may include avoiding transiting through certain places and fast tracking a visa application).

Difficult cases usually require extra expenses and these can be substantial. Fundraising may be needed to cover the costs of medical interventions.

Monitor wellbeing regularly and check essential care needs are met. Social support networks can help with household chores, cooking etc.

Develop a mental health protocol for each defender participating in the programme. This would help indicate when a defender needs psychiatric help, when to contact their family, when to request legal help and to know who should sign medical consent forms if the patient is not able to do so.

Recognise that many health issues take longer than a few months to treat and encourage the defender to seek medical and psychological help as early as possible.

¹⁹
www.somosdefensores.org/

Understand that some defenders may be fearful of starting a treatment that they may not be able to finish within the relocation period. Carefully assess whether wellbeing measures might reinforce trauma, especially when defenders have experienced physical or psychological violence. Try to ensure the ‘Do no harm’ principle, which obliges actors intervening in conflict settings to prevent any negative impact of their actions on affected individuals and populations.²⁰

In some cases, there may be an option to find local help groups for alcoholics and drug users for defenders suffering from addictions.

Support the relocation of family members when a defender is facing heightened wellbeing challenges and requests it. The presence and support of family members is considered to be particularly beneficial given that the defender does not have the added stress of worrying about them from afar. Additionally, the family can provide an immediate support network for the defender.

Consider extending the period of relocation if a defender requires prolonged medical treatment. Likewise, facilitate the continuation of treatment as far as possible after return and/or ensure the continuity of treatment if a defender transitions to another relocation initiative.

Key considerations

Defenders may not disclose certain medical conditions or the extent of their ‘unwellness’ in advance. Relocation itself can be a source of stress and anxiety, removing defenders from their usual networks of support. While the defender can benefit from being accompanied by family members in the short term, it can become an added area of anxiety in the longer term as other issues such as housing, schooling and challenges of displacement arise. It is worth noting that if a defender is alone and has to be hospitalised during relocation, programme staff may need to take medical decisions on their behalf which can raise difficult ethical and legal questions. Some defenders find it difficult to trust mental health practitioners and may be fearful that psychological interventions open deep wounds. Some would prefer to focus solely on improving their physical health whilst in relocation.

²⁰
For more details, see page 4 in:
[www.ohchr.org/Documents/
Publications/Chapter02-
MHRM.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/Chapter02-MHRM.pdf)

Case Study III

Shelter City Tbilisi

Shelter City Tbilisi define a difficult case as one where the defender needs psychiatric interventions rather than psychological support. In two recent cases this diagnosis was only made once the defenders were in relocation. The defenders were unable to evaluate their own condition and behaviours, to be 'legally independent' and to take care of themselves. The programme had to react to these cases with very little medical knowledge and experience in dealing with such cases. Their key learnings were the following:

1.
Gather information from the defender in advance.
2.
Attain a local medical diagnosis as soon as possible.
3.
Contact immediate family for advice and accompaniment when possible.
4.
Facilitate access to appropriate professional care as a matter of urgency.
5.
Keep some funding aside for such emergencies.
6.
Seek support from wider networks and other defenders in relocation.

IV. Wellbeing of staff and supporters of relocation initiatives

Context

The responsibility of managing the relocation of defenders at risk often falls to a small number of people who are supporting them in different ways. They may feel overwhelmed by the emotional and ethical demands of supporting defenders, especially those who work mostly alone. Working with defenders can also result in wellbeing support providers experiencing exhaustion, burnout and secondary trauma.

The Guidelines recommend that relocation initiatives support the wellbeing of staff, in particular of coordinators and others directly responding to the wellbeing needs of defenders, including volunteers (**recommendation 15**). They also recommend that wellbeing support providers consider their own wellbeing and model good wellbeing practices as they provide support to defenders (**recommendation 40**).

Good practice

Acknowledge that working with defenders in relocation may often be very demanding and therefore having a team, group and community-based style of management can improve the wellbeing of all involved.

Develop organisational policies that actively support the wellbeing of coordinators and the wider team.

Supportive policies should include providing clear organization policies (e.g. about working outside of office hours), restricting staff working at weekends and evenings, having an office emergency contact phone so defenders are not ringing personal phones, rotating on-call duty for out of hours emergency contact and ensuring staff take holiday and adequate breaks.

Encourage an environment of trust and openness and respect between staff and volunteers where everyone can express themselves freely and concerns can be acknowledged. Such an environment will allow space for peer support and mentorship and for staff to ‘debrief’ at particularly demanding times.

Example 1

The *EU Temporary Relocation Platform EUTRP* provides opportunities for peer support among relocation programmes. It supports and coordinates an exchange platform for over 50 organisations and stakeholders working on temporary relocation for human rights defenders with opportunities to meet annually to discuss challenges and best practices.

Example 2

Some larger relocation programmes (*ICORN*, *Justice and Peace*, Netherlands) benefit from bringing staff together on a regular basis or at least once a year to debrief and share concerns.

Model good practices in addressing wellbeing by recognising your own struggles with wellbeing and seeking support for yourself. Offer education and training on wellbeing for programme coordinators and staff. This training should include dealing with the impact of relocation, recognising symptoms of stress and trauma as well as the management of professional and personal boundaries. Share workloads, particularly amongst those working on difficult cases to reduce stress levels and promote collective care. It is good practice for members of staff to have the ability to withdraw from a relocation case if it is causing distress.

Ensure that staff have access to healthcare and provide access to counselling and other types of wellbeing therapies for staff affected by the demands of their role. Costs for staff wellbeing should to be included in the budget.

Organise team building initiatives such as ‘away days’ and shared meals for staff to promote wellbeing.

Example 1

Shelter City Tbilisi has arranged for a daily homemade lunch to be prepared for its staff. This is an opportunity for colleagues to gather together in an informal setting and to ensure that they are well nourished.

Example 2

People in Need organise an annual retreat for staff working on the protection programme. Members of the team are invited to spend a few days relaxing together away from their normal working environment.

Reach out to support networks and friends in the community to help share the pastoral care of defenders. This not only reduces the number of demands on one individual but can also provide much needed support at particularly demanding times.

Example 1

Members of the Friends Scheme at *CAHR* regularly invite the defenders to social and cultural events, civil society meetings, trips to places of interest in the area and meals in their homes (Case Study I on p. 6).

Example 2

In the 'Buddy Scheme' run by *Justice and Peace*, Netherlands, operates a 'Buddy Scheme'. Members of the scheme provide social and emotional support for defenders by organising a variety of social activities and accompanying them to conferences, events and on recreational trips.

Case Study IV

Martin Roth-Initiative (MRI), Berlin

The *Martin Roth-Initiative* was founded in 2018 and is thus a relatively young programme. It enables temporary residence in Germany or third countries with the purpose of protecting artists who are at risk in their home country. MRI works in close collaboration with a network of both national and international cultural institutions who support endangered artists. It has a staff of six full-time and two part-time positions and it is based in Berlin.

The MRI places great importance on staff wellbeing and has put in place a number of good practices:

Shared workload

Relocation cases are divided between several case managers. Cases and workloads are regularly reviewed and redistributed when needed to maintain an even balance of work amongst individual staff members. In a weekly meeting, the team members exchange information about their current challenges and questions in order to work together on difficult issues rather than leaving it to one named person to deal with them. Staff take turns to be the emergency contact during out of office hours.

Staff development and recognition

MRI staff are given access to various training and networking events. Capacity building and professional development is carried out both as a team and on an individual basis, including trainings in digital security and financial management. All the staff team is included in the strategic planning and reflection of the work of MRI thus recognising the role of individuals and enhancing the overall team spirit.

Specialised wellbeing support

MRI staff received workshops on dealing with the psychosocial impacts of relocation. They can access other specific trainings, e.g. on how to have difficult conversations. When MRI team members experience emotionally difficult situations, they can make use of a contingent of supervision hours within a framework contract with an external coach. These sessions of professional supervision are confidential and the costs are covered by MRI.

Supportive work environment

Consideration is given to the particular needs of individual staff members (e.g. childcare needs, transport and travelling issues) when arranging events and workers' availability.

Support for staff in host organisations

People who work in the cultural institutions that host the relocated artists are also supported with capacity building, training and networking events. Attendance at such events is optional but it is valued as an opportunity to share concerns and receive peer support. Host organisations can budget for coaching costs for individual staff members in order that they may access specialist care for particular needs related to their work roles and wellbeing.

Supportive management

Management steps in to support colleagues working on problematic cases. Management monitors workloads and ensures that staff take breaks and holidays when needed. There is dialogue between staff and management to ensure the professional development of staff and the support needed to deal with psychosocial issues arising from the work they carry out.

Compliance with labour law

As MRI employees are subjected to German labour laws which regulate the conditions under which they work, they document every working hour in order to receive compensation days in cases when over time has been accumulated. Strict compliance with these regulations helps to support the wellbeing of staff.

